

Partnership for Quality Care, Congressmen Crowley, Nadler, Engel & Healthcare Advocates Call for Increase in State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)

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Bronx, NY—Surrounded by dozens of children, Congressmen Joe Crowley and Jerrold Nadler today joined Greater New York Hospital Association President Ken Raske and 1199/SEIU incoming President George Gresham, (both of whom were also representing the new national coalition the Partnership for Quality Care), Montefiore Medical Center's Sr. Vice President and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Steven Safyer and health advocates at the Children's Hospital at Montefiore to support fully funding the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

"Every child in America should grow up healthy and have access to good doctors and adequate medical care," said Rep. Joe Crowley, member of the House Committee on Ways and Means that has shared jurisdiction over SCHIP. "To make that a reality, SCHIP--the federal-state partnership that offers health care coverage to our children--must have the resources it needs to maintain the level of care for those receiving its benefits and to expand coverage for our uninsured. That is why the Democratic-led Congress is going to make sure the federal government pays its fair share to ensure access for all children, including the 6.8 million who qualify for coverage under Medicaid or SCHIP but are not currently enrolled."

SCHIP covers millions of children nationwide and is widely recognized as a key component in reaching universal coverage for not only America's youth, but the entire population, here in New York, the program is especially vital. It provides healthcare coverage to nearly 400,000 kids in the Empire State alone, according to statistics released this month.

"By fully funding SCHIP, we can help keep our children healthy and strong," said Rep. Jerrold Nadler. "It is shameful that hundreds of thousands of children in New York--indeed, millions across the nation--remain without healthcare coverage. Federal SCHIP funding is a key factor in the success of New York's Child Health Plus program, and the expansion we are pushing will help cover many more in need. Indeed, the more we spend on preventative care, the less we need to spend on children using the emergency room for medical problems that might have been avoided."

"I am a strong supporter of strengthening and expanding SCHIP, the single largest expansion of health insurance coverage for children since the initiation of Medicaid in 1965," said Rep. Eliot Engel. "One of the first items on our agenda in the Energy and Commerce Committee is the reauthorization of the SCHIP. As a member of House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, with jurisdiction over SCHIP, I will work hard to modernize and strengthen this important program. With 2/3rds of all uninsured children eligible for SCHIP, we must improve outreach to provide coverage to these deserving children. When we fail to provide our citizens with primary and preventive care, routine health problems compound into emergency conditions."

The timing could not be better to use an increase in the federal tobacco tax to help pay for the \$50 billion over five years that experts predict will be needed to fully fund the federal SCHIP program. Earlier this month the national Institute of Medicine released a report that said efforts to decrease smoking have stalled, and laying out aggressive steps that need to be taken in order to decrease smoking, a national problem which takes up a staggering \$89 billion a year in healthcare costs.

In calling for a federal tax on tobacco to fund SCHIP, advocates pointed out that such a tax had been used to support SCHIP at its inception, and that tobacco taxes have been demonstrated to decrease smoking, especially among young people. \$50 billion in additional SCHIP funding is necessary not only to preserve an adequate level of funding for children in need of health insurance, but because SCHIP is a boost to New York State's economy, contributing more than

\$2.7 billion in federal funds since the program was founded in 1997.

"Expanding SCHIP and using a tobacco tax to help finance it is not only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do," said Greater New York Hospital Association (GNYHA) President Kenneth E. Raske. "I can think of no more important goal than making sure every child in the United States has health insurance, and protecting and expanding SCHIP funding is a critical step towards achieving that goal."

The Partnership for Quality Care (PQC), of which GNYHA and 1199/SEIU are founding members, is a unique, new coalition bringing together healthcare providers and labor unions to reform and improve the American health care system. It includes public, private, religious, teaching and nonprofit hospitals and integrated health systems as well as more than a million health care workers across the country. PQC, whose members care for more than 45 million patients each year, strongly supports SCHIP expansion.

"As representatives of front-line healthcare workers, we know how important SCHIP is to hundreds of thousands of families in New York and throughout the nation," said George Gresham, President, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East and PQC member. "There are nine million uninsured children in the United States, and every day our workers see children in the emergency room for complications that could have been avoided with timely care. By making preventive and primary care more affordable, SCHIP helps parents keep kids healthy and in school, where they belong."

Today's event marks just one piece of a national effort aimed at raising national awareness about just how vital SCHIP is to America's kids. Earlier this month, similar events were held across the country in cities including Oakland, Los Angeles, Florida, Portland (OR), Providence (RI), Columbia (SC), Seattle and Green Bay (Wis.)

"This is the beginning of a national campaign, which brings together voices of the people on the front lines of health care--the health care workers and providers of care--who see and know from personal experience what happens when reliable access to good quality care is lacking," Dr. Steven Safyer, Sr. Vice President and Chief Medical Officer at Montefiore Medical Center. "We are united in our support of fully funding the state Children's Health Insurance Program at \$50 billion over the next five years."

"As a pediatrician in a safety-net health care institution, I know first-hand how vulnerable many children from families of limited economic means are to lacking the consistent, reliable primary pediatric care so necessary to their early health and development," said Dr. Natasha Teiwani of Jacobi Medical Center, a local leader of the Committee of Interns and Residents/SEIU. "SCHIP helps overcome that vulnerability, and therefore needs to be fully funded and expanded so that we can come closer to fulfilling our promise of good health for all America's children."

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